

Power of Words: Part 5

Guarding Your Tongue

Pastor James Bell

James 1:19 NLT

19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.

James addresses us very bluntly throughout his letter to the church. And this next set of instructions brings a reminder of the innate calling from our time of conversion into followers of the way. And what way is that? The ways of Jesus. James strategically begins with the word of “Understand”. Some translations use the word know or remember. The greek meaning is to know intuitively or instinctively. To make this even easier to understand it means for it to take place naturally without planning. It is something that takes place naturally.

And so who are the ones that this natural instinct should be observed by? The Body of Christ. James was addressing the church from the very beginning of this letter and continued throughout with the verbiage of Brothers and Sisters.

We must all be quick to listen...Of the three actions that James tells us to take, only one speaks of our promptness to do something. And the one thing that our attention has been called to is not a favorite from most people. Listening positions us in a state of silence. And notice how listening is the very first thing mentioned. We have all heard the saying that we have been given two ears and one mouth. How much trouble would we truly be in if we had two mouths? Listening requires our attentiveness. Our attention cannot be in two places at the same time. If our attention is divided then we have failed to surrender the first call of action to guarding our tongue. If we are speaking then we have not surrendered our ears to hear.

Listening is not a passive reception of just receiving but our active pursuit of perception.. The root word for listen is to perceive. To perceive means to place yourself in the other persons shoes. To view it from their point of view. When we operate in this we are purposely involving our thoughts and emotions. Our silence makes room to think.

Proverbs 15:28 NLT

28 The heart of the godly thinks carefully before speaking; the mouth of the wicked overflows with evil words.

Notice the intentionality that wisdom speak of here. Thinking excludes our opinions. Thinking is fertile ground for wisdom. If we are quick to speak without listening then we have already rendered judgement without perception.

After we listen carefully, we are encouraged to speak slowly. This is not alluding to someone with a speech impediment, but to give weight to the words we are about to speak. It's not tippy toeing around what we are saying but understanding the magnitude of what we are about to say.

We mentioned in part 2 of this series that we will be addressing the value of words and we have been mentioning this weekly but here is where the rubber meets the road. Do you remember having to present an essay from a book in school. Or you have to prepare a speech to present before a group of people. The words that you wrote down or spoke were strategically placed with purpose. You orchestrated your words to be purposeful. You understood the weight or the value of the words you would be speaking because they would carry so much meaning. Being slow in speech is a disciplined hesitation. Being quick to hear and slow to speak is not an inability, they are intentional restraints.

James did not say never speak, he only warns us to speak carefully. As we have studied through this series that the Power of Words are creative, death and life, destructive, and that they heal and build up. We have talked about this implications of the Power that words how and now are encouraged to speak slowly. Words are seeds and if we plant the wrong seed, we will see the wrong fruit and this is where James takes us next. Being slow to anger.

James 1:19–20 NLT

19 Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. 20 Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.

If we will listen intently and speak carefully then most often we avoid anger. But let us not confuse the kind of anger that James was speaking about. What James is genuinely telling us is that human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Ephesians 4:26–27 NLT

26 And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

Anger is a natural emotion but the question is how is it channeled. If anger is puffed up, unforgiving, holds grudges, or simply anything that produces the opposite of godly character then it is of the flesh. This is unrighteous anger and brings no glory to God. James did not say that anger was a sin and Paul said it becomes sin when it controls us. James was identifying a type of anger - human anger, fleshly anger, anger arising from wounded ego or personal offense.

So we need to answer the question about what kind of anger does God desire from us? God’s anger comes from obvious injustice and sin against Him. God’s anger is aroused when His people are being persecuted and mistreated. God’s anger is displayed by abuse and greed. God’s anger is furious when people elevate things above Him with idolatry worship. Anger that flows from love for the vulnerable and hatred of injustice. Righteous anger is fueled by love, and a desire to see broken people healed and whole. We must be angry with the sin. Don’t get that confused. We are not to be angry with the sinner but the sin!

Hebrews 1:8–9 AMP

8 But as to the Son, He says to Him, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever (to the ages of the ages), and the scepter of Your kingdom is a scepter of absolute righteousness (of justice and straightforwardness). 9 You have loved righteousness [You have delighted in integrity, virtue, and uprightness in purpose, thought, and action] and You have hated lawlessness (injustice and iniquity). Therefore God, [even] Your God (Godhead), has anointed You with the oil of exultant joy and gladness above and beyond Your companions.

So many people want to be dripping with oil but the oil does not come from just loving what is righteousness. The oil is two fold. We must love righteousness and hate sin. We must love what God loves and hate what God hates. When we view sin the same way that God views sin, then we will respond to sin the same way that God responds to sin.

So since we are talking about Jesus follow me over to several select scriptures:

Matthew 27:11–14 NLT

11 Now Jesus was standing before Pilate, the Roman governor. “Are you the king of the Jews?” the governor asked him. Jesus replied, “You have said it.” 12 But when the leading priests and the elders made their accusations against him, Jesus remained silent. 13 “Don’t you hear all these charges they are bringing against you?” Pilate demanded. 14 But Jesus made no response to any of the charges, much to the governor’s surprise.

Luke 23:8–9 NLT

8 Herod was delighted at the opportunity to see Jesus, because he had heard about him and had been hoping for a long time to see him perform a miracle. 9 He asked Jesus question after question, but Jesus refused to answer.

John 19:9–10 NLT

9 He took Jesus back into the headquarters again and asked him, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave no answer. 10 “Why don’t you talk to me?” Pilate demanded. “Don’t you realize that I have the power to release you or crucify you?”

Jesus perfectly displayed the very thing that James is speaking to the church. Quick to listen: Jesus understood what His accusers were saying. Slow to speak: Jesus chose His words carefully or did not speak at all. Slow to anger: Because Jesus executed the first two so well He had no recourse of anger. He knew what we must understand.

Romans 12:19 NLT

19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” says the LORD.

We have all taken vengeance into our own hands and truth be told, the outcome did not produce anything righteous. We only dug a deeper hole and we know that eventually the hole becomes so deep that we can not get out without help.

Peter reminds us:

1 Peter 2:21 NLT

21 For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps.

God has called us to His definition of good and doing life His way might mean that we will have to suffer.

Matthew 16:21 NLT

21 From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that it was necessary for him to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer many terrible things at the hands of the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, but on the third day he would be raised from the dead.

Everything that Jesus suffered to was for our benefit and it is only fair that what we suffer would be for the edification of the Kingdom of God.

1 Peter 2:22–23 NLT

22 He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. 23 He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.

Jesus held his peace and left the revenge in God's hands. Jesus could have called for legends of angel but He submitted His will to the will of the Father. Jesus guarded His tongue. He showed us how to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger. Jesus displayed the deepest dimension of guarding your tongue is that silence becomes an act of trust. When we refrain from defending ourselves, we are declaring that vindication belongs to God alone.

Every word withheld in anger, every accusation left unanswered, every impulse to defend yourself that you surrender becomes a mirror of Christ's own restraint. The power to speak is subordinated to the greater power of trusting God's justice. That's the paradox: controlling your tongue demonstrates that you've truly surrendered control to God.

Leave here today and place into practice these attributes in your daily conversations and knowing that the power of words is what God has entrusted us to steward. Be swift to listen, slow to speak, and slow to anger.